

Board of Regents For Elementary and Secondary Education

Meeting Held At:

Isaac Paine Elementary School, Foster
160 Foster Center Rd.
Foster, RI 02825

Thursday, February 4th, 2010 4:00 p.m.

Attending: R. Flanders, P. Guida, B. Shimberg, A. Cano-Morales, A. Beretta, K. Forbes

The meeting convened at 4:08 pm.

Chairman Flanders requested that an item be added to the Executive Agenda on the Commissioner's Job Performance.

Moved and Seconded: THAT, the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education add to the February 4, 2010, executive agenda: Discussion of Commissioner's Job Performance.

VOTE: Approved unanimously.

Commissioner's Remarks

Commissioner Gist thanked the Foster teachers for being the first to sign the Race to the Top MOU and told them that she appreciates their trust and confidence in the belief that what we are doing is not only the best for students, but also the best for teachers.

Strategic Plan Priorities - The Commissioner told the group that the Department is now developing work plans for the strategic plan priorities.

Evaluation System Standards Rubric – Commissioner Gist reported that Department staff has drafted an Evaluation Systems Standards Rubric document that will be shared publicly and sent to Regents shortly. This will be guidance to districts so they will know if their evaluation system meets Regents' standards. The rubric will come back to a Regents' work session for review at a future date.

Common Core of Learning Initiative Update – Commissioner Gist said that feedback is being collected on the draft Common Core document. The intent, however, is not yet quite clear. To do a true evaluation, more detail around the standards is needed. What we have received so far is not yet ready for analysis however, from a rigor perspective, we are in good shape. We have developed an engagement committee with preK-12 and higher education. It is still unclear, however, as to how states would carry this out during transition and if we can still use our own standards. We will integrate this into summer work, tied to the Dana Center work. Race to the Top funds would be used to train every teacher.

ESEA Reauthorization ~ The Commissioner reported that President Obama has called for reauthorization and that she met with the Secretary of Education in mid-January on the issue. The President included \$4.5 billion in education-funding increases, presuming the passage of reauthorization. The Administration is interested in increased flexibility and tighter accountability.

Certification ~ Revisions to the certification process will be brought before the Board at the next work session, with a vote for approval for public comment at the March meeting. The proposed revisions involve moving from an input-based process to a focus on results and effectiveness.

Charter Schools – The deadline for organizations to apply to open or expand charter schools was December. Applications are being reviewed and will be brought before the board within the next couple of months.

Public Remarks

Young Voices of Central Falls High School, Carmen Mota, Sammy Ogunolare, and Victoria Salako spoke to the Board about the lack of sufficient school supplies in Central Falls and the lack of teacher support for students. They also said that the State is not putting any additional money into the school because of the lack of student performance.

John Ward, Woonsocket City Council, addressed the Board on the funding formula. He would like to see a quick passage of a funding formula to help Woonsocket solve its financial problems. He told the members of the Board that there are inequities in the system. Woonsocket participates in Social Security, but not all districts do. The formula has to account for these differences. Additionally, a five-year minimum is too long to wait to implement a new formula. Rather, there should be a 5-year maximum. Some communities don't have a need and will get funds anyway. Mr. Ward expressed his support for the current proposal, but he still has concerns.

Mary Ryan – expressed her concern about the standardization of the arts. She said it could be very stifling for children. She also talked about her concern about the disparities between wealthy and poor districts, i.e., some districts don't have materials for art, whereas others do.

Lorraine O'Conner, former Foster-Glocester school-committee member – told the Regents that she applauds their attempt to reinstall a funding formula. However, some inequities remain when it comes to dealing with rural communities. Median family incomes are not a fair measure because money earned here is spent elsewhere. Also, transportation is a major issue in a rural community where everyone has to be bused. Free and reduced-price lunch works well in elementary schools; however, in the higher grades, kids don't want to be counted as free and reduced-price lunch. Open space should not be taxed because it will hurt the rural tax base.

Chairman's Remarks

Chairman Flanders cited the accomplishments of the Board and Department - the Pre-K demonstration project; the finished BEP; passage of the teacher - evaluation standards and code of conduct; the strategic plan; and the RTTT proposal. He thanked his colleagues on the Board of Regents, the Commissioner, and RIDE staff. He said that all of these achievements position Rhode Island well for success. The Commissioner is generating tremendous support (60+ letters of support for RTTT). Districts, business groups, and legislative leadership have all endorsed the RTTT application and Foster NEA, Providence AFT, and RI - AFT have all endorsed the proposal. He thanks these organizations, and said that he is looking forward to working with them. The next major challenge is the funding formula. This is the year where its chances of success are greater than ever. It is long past due that Rhode Island has an equitable funding formula that supports students based on their needs.

Approval of Minutes of the Board of Regents Meetings of January 7, 2010; January 7, 2010, Executive Minutes; and January 21, 2010, Work Session Minutes.

MOVED AND SECONDED: THAT, the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education Approves the Minutes of the January 7, 2010, meeting; the January 7, 2010, Executive meeting; and the January 21, 2010, Work Session, as attached.

VOTE: Approved Unanimously.

Approval of Appeal/C. Doe v. West Warwick School Committee

Chairman of the Board of Regents Appeals Committee, Amy Beretta, presented the Appeal of the West Warwick School Committee from the Decision of the Commissioner in the matter of C. Doe v. the West Warwick School Committee. Ms. Beretta told the members of the Board that the dispute was about Student Doe's enrollment in a cosmetology program at Coventry High School. The Commissioner ruled that the student should be able to attend the school on a trial basis. Regent Beretta summarized the arguments. The Appeals committee supports the Commissioner's decision, noting that the student attended the program and excelled.

MOVED AND SECONDED: THAT, in the Matter of C. Doe v. the Town of West Warwick, the Commissioner's Decision is Upheld.

VOTE: Approved Unanimously.

Approval of Arts Grade Span Expectations, for public hearing

Commissioner Gist reminded the Board that the Regents had reviewed the Arts Grade Span Expectations at its last work session and the expectations are now before the Regents for approval for public hearing. The grade-span expectations were developed, reviewed, and approved by the entire arts community before coming to the Board. They are based on four areas: artistic process, cultural context, communication, and aesthetic judgment.

MOVED AND SECONDED: THAT, the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education Approves the Grade Span Expectations for the Arts, as presented.

VOTE: Approved unanimously.

Education Funding Formula

Commissioner Gist told the Regents that department staff is continuing its work on the education funding formula. A methodology has been drafted with Dr. Wong of Brown, based on the best work that has been done in Rhode Island to date. The information on the methodology presented at the previous work session was very preliminary. Since that meeting, the department has received tremendous feedback from various education constituents from around the state. Feedback has centered on two issues: how we arrived at the core instructional amount and how the formula itself was structured. There seems to be resounding support for the way in which the formula is structured, balancing community ability to resource schools and student needs. The primary question is how to determine ability to pay. We are continuing to collect feedback and will, at a future meeting, ask the Regents to endorse a formula that we can rally behind. The next step is to clarify categorical funds outside of the formula. Right now, that would be high-cost special needs, as well as high-cost career and technical programs and early-childhood education. To summarize, we are developing a funding formula focused on the child, i.e., what it costs to educate a child in Rhode Island, and then making sure that the funding follows the child so that we're funding systems of education and not bureaucracy. The group talked about the timeline for the phase-in of a formula – a 10-year transition, but communities that need additional funding will start to receive funding quickly. Districts losing funding would have longer. The goal is to get funding to underfunded districts as soon as possible, but also to be realistic with those districts that are losing funding. The Regents discussed a timeline for getting a formula passed by the General Assembly this session and possible sponsors for the bill. Chairman Flanders emphasized that the key focus has been to get the legislative leadership to understand what is being proposed and to support it. He explained that this proposal has drawn on what's been successful in other parts of the country and does not depend on additional funding to make it work, as opposed to proposals from years past.

NECAP Scores

Commissioner Gist reported that the NECAP report is on the department's Web site and acknowledged the increase in reading test scores at Central Falls High School. Additionally, she told the Regents that the Isaac Paine School saw significant increases in math scores and the Foster-Glocester school district scores increased in both reading and math. Overall, statewide results improved only slightly in reading and math. Grade-11 writing improved significantly, but there will be a different writing prompt next year. Rhode Island students scored the highest in New England in writing. Our high-school students were at 73% proficient, higher than Vermont and the same as New Hampshire. Our scores still remain the lowest in the region in our other tested grades, however. In mathematics Rhode Island students are struggling. The ongoing curriculum work in mathematics is important. If curriculum and instruction are not aligned, our students will not get where they need to be. We are still concerned about subgroup performance - students of color, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students. In some instances, the achievement gaps are actually increasing. We are going to have to see even greater increases to meet targets for 2012 in our strategic plan. A great story is the Anthony Carnevale School, where our press event was held. They did a fantastic job of dispelling the notion that children in poverty cannot succeed at high levels. The Regents talked about what districts can do to increase student-achievement levels and how that work can be facilitated by the Department of Education.

Budget Update

Commissioner Gist reported that the Governor's budget includes many of the same budget-reduction strategies that appeared in the 2010 revised budget; however, proposed cuts to state aid go much deeper. The Governor is looking for additional efficiencies. The higher-education board has been asked to absorb RIHEAA and Channel 36 and to report on how the higher-education offices and elementary and secondary education offices can work more closely together. The Governor is also recommending replacing Caruolo actions with a 3-member panel that would include the Commissioner, a requirement that municipalities approve teacher contracts, a statewide purchasing system, and cost-sharing for health insurance (25%). The 2011 budget includes \$15 million in stabilization money. Regents discussed the various budget and legislative proposals, and it was agreed that a more in-depth discussion would be held at a future work session.

Legislative Update

Commissioner Gist reported that the Senate Committee on Education will discuss the work of the Department of Education and will ask for a status report on school transportation, food-service contracts, and the reorganization of the department. Additionally, the House HEW Committee will hear legislation to eliminate the cap on charter schools. The Commissioner told the group that she will testify in favor of that legislation because of its importance for RTTT.

BOR 2/4/10 Meeting
Page 6.

Executive Session

As per RIGL 42-46-5(a)(1), the meeting adjourned at 6:05 p.m. into Executive Session.

The meeting reconvened to open session at 6:20 p.m.

Chairman Flanders reported that during Executive Session there were no votes taken.

MOVED AND SECONDED: THAT, the minutes of the Executive Session be sealed.

VOTE: Approved Unanimously.

Adjournment: With Unanimous consent, the meeting adjourned at 6:25 p.m.